

STREET SMART

Michael A. Richards

Sounds of a 56k dial-up modem connecting to the internet.

Connects.

Keyboard clicking.

FADE IN:

INSERT: COMPUTER MONITOR

Early internet chatroom messages bounce up the screen:

<Chipstopher>: anyone got live metallica?
<neuromancer95>: message xdcc bot for a slot
<Chipstopher>: queue full?
<neuromancer95>: always

END INSERT

CLOSE UP of teenager's thin face, illuminated by the CRT screen. This is CHRISTOPHER, 17, he's a computer whiz--he owns more computers than pairs of pants.

He types rudimentary code into the chat client:

"/msg [MP3] Metallica xdcc send #6"

He presses ENTER and computer code executes, then a little box pops up:

"FTP: Download 0.0% complete... calculating..."

...

...

Christopher taps his fingers impatiently.

...

"FTP: Download 0.00001% complete... 19 years 302 days remaining..."

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A mattress on the floor. Smashing Pumpkins, Sublime, Jeff Buckley posters. Piles of floppy discs and CDs; PC cables strewn about. This was life downloading music before Napster!

CHRISTOPHER

COME ON!!

He goes back to the keyboard.

<Chipstophor>: these downloads are crawling
 <Chipstophor>: like doom on a 14.4

<1337HaXX0r>: My school has a T1 line.
 <1337HaXX0r>: It's sick.

<neuromancer95>: NYU has a fat pipe

Christopher leans back in his seat and looks out the window of his run-down walk-up in Jersey to the distant city.

NYC! It sparkles like a jewel.

ANTONY (22)--Christopher's older brother; razor-spiked hair; T-shirt pressed so crisp it creases when he breathes--appears in the doorway.

ANTONY

Christopher--we still on for tomorrow?

CHRISTOPHER

Shit!

Christopher goes to the screen again and pulls up the clock:
11:18PM - Thursday March 17th, 1996.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Damn! Yeah... Dial-up sucks.

ANTONY

Let 'em wait. You ain't Tower Records.

Christopher stands abruptly, quickly starts filling a backpack with 250MB zip drives & a handful of CDs.

CHRISTOPHER

I got a work around.
 (slings backpack over
 shoulder)

I could pass for NYU, right?

Antony skeptically eyes his skinny baby-faced brother, then reaches in his wallet, passes him a fake driver's license.

Christopher flips it in his hand.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Ludwig from Idaho!?

ANTONY

Take it or leave it!

INT. HOBOKEN PATH STATION - LATER

Christopher breezes through the subway station he's been through a thousand times before.

CLINK as he drops a token in the turnstyle; CLUNK as he walks through.

DING! He hops onto the train just before the doors close.

EXT. 9TH STREET STATION - NIGHT

Yellow cabs honk through narrow streets, steam rises from manholes, and the smell of pastrami hangs in the air.

EXT. WASHINGTON SQ. PARK - NIGHT

The park buzzes with NYU students enjoying a late night with few worries. A slimey guy hocking fake Rolex watches.

Beside the fountain, a small group passes a joint.

Christopher sidles up to them.

CHRISTOPHER
Hey--can I bum a cigarette?

EXT. NYU COMPUTER LAB - LATER

The grand marble main entrance, students milling about. Some walking into the building, others exiting.

PULL BACK to the street where Christopher peeks the entrance, then continues straight past--he's going in the back.

Cigarette smoke hits his nostrils before he turns.

A couple of students are puffing away, a mix of stress from finals and nicotine addiction.

Christopher puts a cigarette in his mouth.

CHRISTOPHER
Got a light?

LATER

The last person smoking finishes up and swipes back into the building. Christopher lets the door start to close, then slips his foot in to catch it open. He takes a long drag, throws his butt onto the concrete, then enters.

INT. NYU COMPUTER LAB HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Christopher makes his way down the hallway towards the computer lab. At the last moment he spots a security camera and ducks down a different hallway--goes the long way around.

COMPUTER LAB

Christopher casually walks down the aisles of computers until he spots someone stand and walk to the old dot-matrix printer--they'll be waiting for a while.

Christopher glances around--everyone's absorbed in their screens. He casually walks past the empty computer, pretends to stretch, and palms a notebook page with written login details clearly visible.

Got it!

AT COMPUTER

Log in: success.

mIRC installed.

Once again, Christopher begins his downloads:

"/msg [MP3] Sepultura xdcc send #6"

FTP: Download 1% complete

FTP: Download 22% complete

FTP: Download 46% complete...

Christopher claps his hands together with triumph!

Looks around, sees another student playing Solitaire. Shakes his head--so much tech wasted on these college kids.

LATER

Rows of aging PCs hum. Multiple CD drives blink in staggered rhythm.

Christopher moves between them--swapping zip disks, ejecting CDs, feeding the system. A one-man assembly line.

On-screen: transfers ticking upward.

A graduate student approaches.

STUDENT

We're closing in five.

Christopher doesn't look up.

CHRISTOPHER
I'm mid-transfer. Can I finish up?

A beat.

The student hesitates, then shrugs, walks off.

LATER

Dark now. The lab lit by CRT glow. Machines still running.

Christopher swaps another disc--fast, precise.

Then--

A FLASHLIGHT beam sweeps across the hallway.

Keys jangling. Uneven footsteps.

SECURITY GUARD (O.S.)
(humming Motown)

Christopher freezes.

The CD drive WHIRS louder than it should.

The guard enters.

His flashlight lands on a blinking machine.

He steps closer.

Christopher disappears under the desk. Holds his breath.

The guard pauses.

His radio CRACKLES.

RADIO (V.O.)
Eugene, we need you on the third
floor. Fire exit's propped again.

The guard sighs, rubs his leg, takes one last look at the
blinking drive, then limps out.

Silence.

Christopher emerges.

Ejects the CD.

Grabs everything.

Gone.

INT. 9TH ST PATH STATION - NIGHT

CLINK as he drops a token in the turnstyle; CLUNK as he walks through.

DING as the doors close behind Christopher.

He slides a freshly burned CD into his portable player. The opening synthesizer of "Bullet with Butterfly Wings" fills his headphones as the train pulls away from the city lights-- a bootlegger with his digital bounty.

EXT. HOBOKEN STREET - FRIDAY - DUSK

Antony and Christopher walk down a street of cigarette butts ground into cracked asphalt.

Teens with frosted tips and sagging jeans loiter, plotting Friday night. The air tastes of exhaust and river damp. Distant trains ding their bells.

A delivery van obscures the road as Christopher begins to cross--just as a car passes! HONK!!

At the last second, Antony pulls Christopher back.

ANTONY

You're wrong, but that doesn't mean you have to step into traffic.

Christopher exhales in relief.

CHRISTOPHER

Misread the gap.

They continue across the street and walk along a black fence.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Fine, Seven's the better movie. But Brad Pitt's way better in *12 Monkeys*.

ANTONY

(imitating Pitt)

"What's in the Box?" Nothing in *12 Monkeys* compares.

They stop at a crack in the fence. Christopher pulls back the mesh curtain.

EXT. ABANDONED WONDER BREAD FACTORY - DUSK

Antony ducks through the gap in the fence and a panoramic vista of New York City crystalizes.

Manhattan's glass towers reflect the sunset, bathing the rotting pier and abandoned Wonder Bread factory in warm light—a postcard of promise across the river from decay.

The area's been reclaimed by nature and Hoboken's youth as an evening hangout.

A few are sat on cinder blocks drinking beer.

A teenage boy and girl disappear into the bushes together.

A group of goths with long hair and black clothes pass a cigarette between themselves.

Antony hangs back at the entrance. Christopher spots goths.

CHRISTOPHER

Give me half an hour.

ANTONY

Toss me my book.

Christopher swings his backpack off his shoulder, and pulls out a book: "The Rules: Time-tested Secrets for Capturing the Heart of Mr. Right"

CHRISTOPHER

Looking for a sexy hunk, eh?

ANTONY

It's market research. You gotta know how the other side thinks.

Christopher gets up and with a cheeky smile ribs Antony.

CHRISTOPHER

I just hope Mr. Right treats you right.

Then he quickly jogs away as Antony performatively kicks dirt at him.

Antony watches his brother approach the goths as he cracks open the book and settles in against the fence.

EXT. BESIDE THE BREAK IN THE FENCE - LATER

Antony is chatting up a YOUNG WOMAN.

ANTONY
Yeah! I know Sandy!

NOODLE (21) enters through the fence--tall and thin like a pasta noodle who spends all his money on weed so can't afford to get fat from the munchies.

NOODLE
Antony--your brother around?

Antony warily eyes him back.

NOODLE (CONT'D)
He's got CDs for me.

Antony nods to the crowd near the water.

ANTONY
(to Young Woman)
Tell Sandy I asked about her.

ANTONY (CONT'D)
(to Noodle)
I'll take you.

The two approach a group flipping through CDs. Christopher spots them.

CHRISTOPHER
Noodle!

He gives Noodle an elaborate handshake, then reaches into his bag and passes him a couple of CDs: bootleg copies of the new Bush and Green Day albums.

NOODLE
Christopher! This is sick!

Noodle slides Christopher an eighth of hash wrapped in foil.

CHRISTOPHER
What's this?

NOODLE
It's bare out there, homie. An eighth of hash is all I could find.

Antony shakes his head as Noodle lives down to expectations.

CHRISTOPHER
This isn't exactly plug and play,
Noodle.

NOODLE

You just roll it into a spliff...

He takes back the hash, grabs a paper from his pocket, and inserts a roach.

NOODLE (CONT'D)

Pass me a cigarette.

CHRISTOPHER

I don't smoke. Wait!

Christopher nods to the cigarette already in Noodle's mouth.

NOODLE

I can't let a loosey go for less than a quarter.

Christopher reaches into his pocket and pays. Antony rolls his eyes. Noodle tears the cigarette, drops tobacco on the paper and heats up the hash with a lighter.

Christopher watches closely; Noodle crumbles the hash onto the joint.

CHRISTOPHER

Noodle--which Brad Pitt is better?
Seven or 12 Monkeys?

Noodle raises the joint to his mouth and licks it sealed.

NOODLE

True Romance Brad Pitt.

He lights the joint and takes a long drag.

NOODLE (CONT'D)

(imitating Pitt)

Don't condescend me, man. I'll
fuckin' kill you, man.

Christopher smiles approvingly and leans forward to take the joint. Noodle ignores him and takes another huge drag.

NOODLE (CONT'D)

(imitating Pitt)

Get some beer... and... and some
cleaning products.

Just as he takes another drag a police siren starts and flashing lights fill the area. Everyone scarpers. Christopher grabs his bag, his CDs, and runs.

Noodle takes another huge drag and pockets the hash. Before he can run, Antony grabs his arm and plucks the spliff from his mouth.

Police begin to emerge through the gap in the fence.

A young officer, BUNGLE, calls out.

BUNGLE
High tide is in an hour. Clear out.

Noodle reluctantly hands over the hash.

ANTONY
Gimme his quarter, too.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

Christopher ducks into an alley and catches his breath.

CHRISTOPHER
Too close!

A cop appears at the far end, backlit by street lights--just a silhouette except for the distinctive hat and the badge catching a glint of light.

COP
Caruso! I saw you running.

Christopher, panting, turns to run but sees flashing police lights blocking his escape.

The cop's footsteps echo in the alleyway as he approaches.

COP (CONT'D)
You're selling pirated CDs. This won't slide.

Antony appears, locking eyes with the cop.

ANTONY
Bungle?

BUNGLE
This isn't high school stuff, Antony. I'm booking your brother for selling bootleg CDs.

ANTONY
Oh shit, Bungle! You went into the family business!

BUNGLE

I graduated the academy like everyone else.

Antony saunters past Bungle to his brother's side.

ANTONY

How about you take the CDs and let us go. It's a win for you and we'll get lost.

BUNGLE

I won't have him slinging this junk in my city any more.

ANTONY

Jeez, Bungle. It's not like these kids are going to pay \$20 for a new CD. No one loses out from pirated discs. Anyway,
(to Christopher)
you promise to stop?

Christopher nods meekly and hands the bag of CDs to Antony.

CHRISTOPHER

Promise.

Antony tosses the bag to Bungle who drops it! Antony flashes him a smile and shoots finger guns at him.

ANTONY

Bungle!

BUNGLE

I don't want to see you littering the waterfront. It's a delicate ecosystem.

ANTONY

Ecosystems! Mrs. Elm's biology!

BUNGLE

Is that clear?

ANTONY

Crystal.

Christopher nods and Bungle leaves.

After a beat Antony hands his brother the joint and hash.

CHRISTOPHER

Thanks, man. You saved my ass!

Christopher lights the mushed spliff, inhales, and coughs as he's already out of breath. He offers Antony, who declines.

ANTONY
You can't keep doing this.

CHRISTOPHER
Come on! I just smoke on weekends.

ANTONY
Not the weed. Selling knock-off CDs for pocket change. You wanna end up a loser, like Noodle.

CHRISTOPHER
It's not like that.

ANTONY
It is.

Christopher takes another drag and coughs again.

ANTONY (CONT'D)
Come to work with me on Monday. Ellis is always looking for new talent.

CHRISTOPHER
Screw that!

ANTONY
It's a different game now. Ellis treats it like what it is--a hustle.
(beat)
Dad played by their rules. Ellis hustles them back.

CHRISTOPHER
I don't know.

ANTONY
RadioShack or Wall Street--
(he flicks the quarter to Christopher)
--your move.

Christopher catches the quarter. Holds it. Looks into it like a magic 8 ball deciding his future.

EXT. BROTHERS' APARTMENT - MONDAY MORNING

A pre-war brick walkup with a green awning: "251 6th Street."

INT. ANTONY'S BEDROOM - SAME

Brown cigarette stains web across the ceiling. Layers of lead paint tell the building's age like tree rings.

At the far end of the railroad apartment, Antony's domain: made bed, ironed shirts hung with military precision, weights in the corner.

Antony blasts CK One, checks spikes, heads out.

CHRISTOPHER'S BEDROOM - SAME

Empty Mountain Dew cans pyramid-stacked on a milk crate.

Christopher hunches over a keyboard, typing in the zone.

ANTONY (O.S.)
Come on. We gotta bounce.

SERIES OF SHOTS - MONDAY MORNING COMMUTE**EXT. BROTHER'S APARTMENT - DAWN**

CLINK! Antony flips the lobby's busted mailbox shut as they go.

Antony and Christopher push out past a line of strollers parked outside the pre-K.

EXT. GREENWICH, CT MANSION - SAME

JARED PRESCOTT (50s, pin-stripe ambition) closes his mansion door. A liveried driver snaps the town-car trunk--CHUNK!--and glides away.

PATH STATION - HOBOKEN

Token drops--CLINK! Turnstile bar--CLANK! The brothers squeeze onto the packed car. Steel wheels shriek into the tunnel, a staccato CLINK-CLANK-CLANK echoing like loose change in a can.

INT. TOWN CAR - MOVING

CLOSE UP of Jared sipping espresso. Leather seats. Silent except for the soft whirr of the partition.

WORLD TRADE CENTER CONCOURSE

WIDE SHOT: a flood of commuters. Antony shoulders through; Christopher gawks at the Twin Towers rising overhead.

EXT. WALL STREET / BROAD - MORNING

The town car glides past bleary-eyed tourists jostling for the Charging Bull selfie. A security gate THUDs open for Jared at CASHMERE TRADING.

INT. LIBERTY SECURITIES STAIRWELL

Fluorescent lights buzz; the brothers climb narrow stairs over rat traps.

INT. CASHMERE TRADING - 18TH FLOOR - DAY

A high-tech trading floor: 200 traders at LCD screens, support staff buzzing around them. Jared surveys his kingdom--satisfied--heads into his office.

END SERIES**INT. LIBERTY SECURITIES - SAME**

Antony swings open the door--SMACK! A fist full of rolled-up printouts meets his chest. ELLIS ATOLL, 50s, a linebacker in a polyester suit, perpetual cigar dangling from his mouth.

ELLIS

Caruso! Every minute is money in their pockets, not mine.

Christopher enters, taking in the scene--young traders at ancient computers, shouting into phones, ashtrays everywhere.

ANTONY

This is my brother, Christopher.

ELLIS

It's not bring your kid to work day.

(off Antony's pleading look)

Becker! Show the kid the ropes. Don't let him lose my money.

BECKER (20), bowl cut and Street Fighter tee, waves Christopher over.

AT BECKER'S DESK

Christopher skeptically stares at a text-only computer.

BECKER

This job is so easy a lobotomized infant could do it. Buy low, sell high. Left side's the bid, right side's the ask--

INSERT COMPUTER SCREEN

"AAPL Apple Inc." Bid: \$21.½ | Ask: \$21.½

BECKER (O.S.)

--find someone selling lower than others are buying.

END INSERT

CHRISTOPHER

Who are the buyers and sellers?

BECKER

Some stockbrokers trading in a fancier office than this one. Watch for a gap between the left and the right. Call the broker, pocket the difference.

CHRISTOPHER

Calling brokers? I thought the eighties were over!

BECKER

Hey, this is an upgrade from what we had before!

Becker nods to the empty seat beside him.

CHRISTOPHER

Me? Don't I need a license to place orders?

BECKER

Anyone asks, say you're Antony.

Christopher sits at an empty terminal-wheels already turning.

SERIES OF SHOTS

AT CHRISTOPHER'S DESK - LATER

Christopher stares the unbudging bid-ask spread, then at an empty coffee cup, fighting sleep--

BECKER (O.S.)
Hey, Macarena!

A triumphant shout and nearby high-five as Becker celebrates a trade. Christopher jolts awake. He turns back to his dead screen, sighs, and reaches for the NASDAQ rulebook.

LATER

Christopher's hunched over the MS-DOS terminal, coding. THWACK! Ellis's rolled-up papers find his head.

ELLIS
You're here to work, not dick around.

CHRISTOPHER
There's some interesting stuff here, I could--

ELLIS
--I'm interested in making money, and you're paid on commission, so you should be, too.

LATER

Christopher spots the gap: \$21. $\frac{1}{8}$ | \$21. $\frac{1}{2}$

His hand shoots to the phone.

INTERCUT - PHONE CALL

DEVON (30s), pressed suit and punchable face.

DEVON
Devon Langone. Cashmere Trading.

CHRISTOPHER
Buy 500 Apple at twenty-one and an eighth.

DEVON
Sent.

ON CHRISTOPHER'S SCREEN

The \$21.½ bid vanishes. *Shit!*

BACK TO SCENE

Christopher rushes to Antony.

CHRISTOPHER
Bid disappeared. What now?

AT CHRISTOPHER'S DESK

The price plummets to \$21.00.

ANTONY
Damn, the trade's turning. Give me
the phone.

Antony grabs the phone.

INTERCUT PHONE CALL

DEVON
Devon Langone. Cashmere Trading.

ANTONY
Caruso here. Need to unload 500
Apple at twenty-one.

DEVON
Momentum's the wrong way.

ANTONY
Honor your quote?

Devon's mouse clicks fill the silence.

ANTONY (CONT'D)
Market order, then.
(hangs up)
Piece of shit's walking his bid.

The screen updates: \$20⅞

CHRISTOPHER
(before Antony can
calculate)
Hundred twenty-five dollar loss.

ANTONY
Try to get even. I'll handle Ellis.

LATER

Christopher's sat sheepishly at his desk as Ellis's voice rings out from his office.

ELLIS (O.S.)
A hundred dollars!

A beat as Antony corrects him.

ELLIS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
One twenty five!!? This is MY money
you're setting on fire here,
Caruso! No more strays!

Antony leaves the office and approaches his brother.

ANTONY
Don't worry. I'll make it even.

BECKER
(to Christopher)
Could be worse. Mickey lost a grand
when we convinced him he had The
Clap.

He nods to MICKEY, 25, soul patch and shades, certified ride-or-die.

MICKEY
Hey--I thought I'd never have sex
again. Made it back though.

CHRISTOPHER
How?

MICKEY
Ellis knew Apple was tanking three
days before earnings. I rode it
back.

The boys exchange looks--impressed.

LATER

Everyone's gone. Christopher pores over the NASDAQ rulebook. He spots something interesting:

INSERT - RULEBOOK

"NASDAQ SMALL ORDER EXECUTION
- Digital trading for non-institutional investors
- Orders under 1000 shares"

END INSERT

CHRISTOPHER
 (revelation hitting)
 We can bypass the brokers!

Christopher reaches into his backpack and pulls out a soldering iron, then takes the side panel off the computer.

Christopher works through the night.

INT. LIBERTY SECURITIES - NEXT MORNING

A crowd circles Christopher's desk. Ellis emerges, printouts rolled like a weapon.

ELLIS
 CARUSO!

The crowd parts, revealing Christopher's handiwork.

An open tower PC, jury-rigged modem hissing.

Christopher coding at the screen.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
 Everyone out--

ANTONY
 Wait. You need to see this.

CHRISTOPHER
 (re: open terminal)
 Had to steal a phone line for the
 modem, but...
 (to Becker)
 Show him.

Ellis's anger yields to curiosity. All eyes on the clock:

9:29:57... 58... 59... 9:30:00

ANTONY
 Intel. Eighth spread.

Becker clicks--500 Intel--BUY--ORDER COMPLETE!

BECKER
 It went through!

ANTONY
 Sweet!

ELLIS
Without calling?

CHRISTOPHER
Direct to broker. No backing away
from quotes. Ever. Hit it again.

INTERCUT - LIBERTY SECURITIES / CASHMERE TRADING - CONTINUOUS

ON DEVON - marble restroom, citrus soap. He straightens his tie, smirks at himself.

ON LIBERTY - Becker hammers the return key: trade, trade, trade. Orders fly five times faster than using phones.

ON CASHMERE TRADING FLOOR - Devon reaches his terminal, double-takes.

DEVON
Intel? What the--

Keyboard FLIES--crashes to the floor.

DEVON (CONT'D)
Damn cowboys!

ON LIBERTY - One last click. The spread snaps shut.

BECKER
Six hundred bucks--one spread!

ELLIS
(to Christopher)
How did you...?

CHRISTOPHER
Regular traders were always
supposed to have this access, the
Small Order rule was just buried.

ELLIS
(realizing)
Small order...? The old SOES
system? --Can do that!?

Ellis counts out cash.

CHRISTOPHER
But it's only for dentists and
school teachers. I don't think a
company like ours can use it.

ELLIS
I'll take care of that. Now:
modems. Every terminal.
(brandishing papers)
But I still want reports.

Antony claps his brother's shoulder--proud dad energy.

MICKEY
Digital trading?

ELLIS
...like Goldman Sachs.

Ellis slaps a thousand dollars in Christopher's hand. He looks at it in disbelief. Goes to resist, but Ellis insists.

He relents and pockets the money.

